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# FIVE LETTERS

## TO A FRIEND,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

*The Rev. WILLIAM BROMLEY CADOGAN,*

LATE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT READING, BERKS.

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## *The Rev. WILLIAM BROMLEY CADOGAN,*

LATE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT READING, BERKS.

*By JOHN COOKE,* Minister of the Independent Church MAIDENHEAD, BERKS.

There be ſome that would PERVERT the goſpel of Chriſt: but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other goſpel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed. THE APOSTLE PAUL.

No works ſhall find acceptance in that day,
When all *diſguiſes* ſhall be rent away,
That ſquare not truly with the Scripture plan,
Nor ſpring from love to God, or love to man. COWPER.

LONDON:

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1797.

[ Price SIXPENCE. ]

# FIVE LETTERS

TO A FRIEND,

ON

PRACTICAL

RELIGION.

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By JOHN COOKE,

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT TEWKESBURY.

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1797.

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THE

# PREFACE.

READER, with all the freedom of Chriſtian friendſhip the following letters were written to a friend at Reading, who was one of the late Mr. Cadogan's conſtant hearers, and lived in the moſt friendly habits with him till he "finiſhed his courſe." My friend, after remarking, that "all appearance of enjoying the goſ-"pel any longer at St. Giles's ſeemed to vaniſh,"—requeſted my advice relative to his duty reſpecting his attendance at church. He informed me that ſeveral evangelical *clergymen* had written letters of condolence and advice; but he wiſhed to be in poſſeſſion of my ſentiments alſo. Theſe I have conveyed in the following letters, and as they were intended for many perſons who are not able to obtain a ſight of them, have been entreated and prevailed with to ſend them to the preſs: eſpecially as the hints have been thought calculated to counteract the influence of advice which has been too often given, and appears to me extremely oppoſite to the beſt intereſts of immortal ſouls.

When Mr. Cadogan came firſt to St. Giles's, he did not preach the goſpel. The people waited ſix years, and the Lord brought him to the knowledge of himſelf. Such an event, it muſt be acknowledged, was

unexpected, becauſe it ſeldom happens, and may never happen again. It by no means ſhould be recommended as a *precedent* to God's children, for their rule of duty is not a ſurpriſing occurrence of providence, nor the conjectures of even pious men.

I have ſeen one letter from a ſerious clergyman, which charges the converts of Mr. Talbot with being "too haſty and impatient after he died;" and yet they waited *ſix years!* My friend and others think (as well they may) that this letter breathes too bigoted an attachment to the church.

I am, on the other hand, a diſſenter from the eſtabliſhment, and believe in *the independent right of every Chriſtian ſociety, to elect its own officers, and to judge for itſelf, in every poſſible caſe of religion.* My main deſign, however, in publiſhing theſe letters is neither to defend diſſenting principles,—nor to oppoſe the eſtabliſhed church,—much leſs to draw hearers from *evangelical* clergymen in her communion (may God give them abundant ſucceſs), but to gratify the requeſt of my friend, by pointing out what appears from the word of God to be the duty of him and others in like circumſtances; and to guard them againſt advice which I apprehend to be very detrimental to their happineſs.

In hazarding many of the obſervations, I may diſpleaſe *ſome* good men, particularly ſuch as have given contrary advice: but although I covet no man's friendſhip at the expence of truth and a good conſcience, I would not unneceſſarily offend any perſon. They are not perſons but *principles* I combat, and

things

things which I apprehend to be repugnant to the ſacred oracles:—principles and conduct the more dangerous, for being ſometimes recommended by perſons of reputation for wiſdom and piety.—I ſincerely *love all good men* of every denomination, and rejoice in the friendſhip of ſome of the evangelical clergy, whoſe zealous labours and holy examples are a bleſſing to the people among whom their lot is caſt; and of the benefit of whoſe miniſtry I gladly avail myſelf as often as the opportunity offers; and would circumſtances on *their part* permit, ſhould be happy to hear them in my pulpit. Religious bigotry I abhor, but hope no perſon will call *the love of truth* and *a zeal for religious liberty* by that name. When clergymen adviſe members of the eſtabliſhment to prefer the miniſtry of an erroneous and unconverted teacher among them to a goſpel miniſtry among the Diſſenters (and I could add to the inſtances here mentioned), I call it BIGOTRY; as it betrays an unreaſonable attachment to a party, not ſupported by the bleſſed ſcriptures. I conſider it as contrary to the dictates of the Bible,—and in as direct oppoſition to the duty of churchmen, as it would be to that of diſſenters to hear Arianiſm at a diſſenting meeting, rather than the pure goſpel in the eſtabliſhed church.

Whilſt immortal ſouls are ſitting under a man who teaches lies in the name of the Lord, in hopes of his converſion or removal; "fooliſh virgins" will be eaſy without "oil in their veſſels," and even "the "wiſe virgins ſlumber and ſleep," until in an unexpected moment, "Behold! the bridegroom cometh!"

I do moſt heartily ſubſcribe to the words of Dr. Doddridge, "May GOD, who has an immediate acceſs to "the hearts of men, deliver all *Chriſtian* countries, "and eſpecially all *proteſtant* churches, from ſuch "*teachers* as are here deſcribed; who *take away* and "ſecrete *the key of knowledge* inſtead of uſing it, and "*obſtruct* rather than promote men's *entrance* into the "kingdom of heaven! How loud will *the blood* of "the ſouls they have betrayed cry againſt them in "the awful day of accounts! And how little will the "*wages of unrighteouſneſs*, and the rewards of worldly "policy, be able to arm them againſt *deſtruction*, or to "ſupport them under it." To Chriſtians under ſuch miniſters and amongſt thoſe whoſe corrupt taſte their doctrine might pleaſe, I would ſay with the apoſtle, "Be ye not unequally yoked together (in church-"communion) with unbelievers: for what fellowſhip "hath righteouſneſs with unrighteouſneſs? and what "communion hath light with darkneſs? and what "concord hath Chriſt with Belial? or what part hath "he that believeth with an infidel? Wherefore come "out,—come out from among them, and be ye SEPA-"RATE,—ſaith the Lord." 2 Cor. vi. 11—17.

The firſt of the five following letters contains reflections of condolence with the ſerious people of St. Giles's, on their loſs of the Rev. Mr. Cadogan, and a lamentation that by the very *conſtitution* of the church of England, they, as its members, are deprived of the important privilege of *chooſing their own teachers*,—a privilege which the diſſenters claim and exerciſe.

The

The ſecond letter denies the right of the civil magiſtrate to appoint miniſters over a church of Chriſt, proves the ill effects of ſuch appointments in the great number of teachers in the eſtabliſhment, whoſe characters are oppoſite to thoſe of the paſtors God has promiſed to *his* church.

The third mentions the dangerous tendency of erroneous doctrines,—the commands of Chriſt to ſhun them,—with inſtances of advice from good clergymen, contrary to this advice.

The fourth letter preſents to the reader a ſhort contraſt of the character and miniſtry of an evangelical and dry moral preacher.

The fifth juſtifies my cautions to others, from my own experience of the evil conſequences of a miniſtry of mere *human* appointment.

# LETTER SEVENTH.

ON reading your letter, I was deeply affected with the account you gave me of the character and conduct of your late friend Mr. Cadogan. I had often heard him mentioned as a young man of great promise, and of distinguished piety, but had never had an opportunity of forming a personal acquaintance with him. Your description of him, therefore, was highly interesting to me, and I could not but lament that he was taken away from the world at so early a period. Your account of the manner in which he was called to his eternal rest, was also very affecting. I can easily conceive what a shock it must have given to your feelings, to be informed suddenly, that your friend was dead. I can also easily conceive what a solemn impression it must have made upon your mind, to hear that he died in the midst of his usefulness, and in the midst of his labours. Your reflections on the occasion, and the improvement you made of it, were very proper. Your friend was a young man of great promise, and had begun to run well the Christian race. He had made a considerable progress in the knowledge of divine things, and had begun to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit in a very conspicuous manner. He was, therefore, a very proper example for you to imitate. He was a pattern worthy of your attention, and well calculated to excite you to diligence in the discharge of your duty. His death, at such a time, was a loud call to you to be active in the service of God, and to be ready for the coming of your Lord. It was a call to you to be diligent in the improvement of your time, and to be faithful in the discharge of every duty. It was a call to you to be watchful against the temptations of the world, and to be prepared for the solemn hour of death. It was a call to you to be constant in the duties of religion, and to be abundant in the fruits of righteousness. It was a call to you to be humble, and to be meek, and to be patient, and to be resigned to the will of God. It was a call to you to be charitable, and to be kind to the poor, and to be liberal to the needy. It was a call to you to be forgiving, and to be ready to forgive your enemies. It was a call to you to be peaceable, and to be quiet, and to be orderly in your conduct. It was a call to you to be modest, and to be humble, and to be meek, and to be patient, and to be resigned to the will of God. It was a call to you to be charitable, and to be kind to the poor, and to be liberal to the needy. It was a call to you to be forgiving, and to be ready to forgive your enemies. It was a call to you to be peaceable, and to be quiet, and to be orderly in your conduct.

# LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

ON entering your town at our late aſſociation, a young man informed me that Mr. Davis, the Baptiſt miniſter, died that morning. The *next* time I viſited Reading, for the purpoſe of opening the old chapel, a friend ſtepped up to me and aſked, "Have you heard of our loſs?" On anſwering him in the negative, he ſaid, "Mr. Cadogan is dead." This unexpected information affected me, and through the whole of the day I was led to reflect upon the different impreſſions the event would make on the minds of the inhabitants of Reading! You, among many others, have been awakened to a lively ſenſe of your loſt condition as ſinners—directed to place your confidence and your hopes of ſalvation upon JESUS—the only name under heaven, by which you can be ſaved. Under his evangelical miniſtry you have been nouriſhed up in ſound doctrine and gracious experience. He was indeed a CHRISTIAN divine, and to a great degree ſacrificed his wordly intereſts, honours, and connexions, to the glory of his Redeemer and the good of immor-

tal

tal ſouls. His death is a loſs to all but *himſelf*; for as he lived for Chriſt, ſo to die was his *gain*. "Poor "creature," exclaimed one, "he was cut off in the "midſt of his uſefulneſs." No; he is not a "*poor* "*creature*;" nor does he need our pity. Let that be reſerved for thoſe who are bereaved of him. "Weep "not for him; but for *yourſelves* and your children;" for Jeſus, his ſovereign Lord, has diſmiſſed him *in peace*, in the moſt proper ſeaſon, to fill another poſt of ſervice, of honour, and of joy, in a better ſtate of exiſtence. Let us not ſpeak of him in the language of condolence, but of congratulation!

Happy ſpirit! he has exchanged worlds, to his unutterable advantage! He reſts from his chriſtian conflicts and miniſterial labours; and thoſe ſouls who are the ſeals of his miniſtry, will ſoon follow him, and be welcomed by him, into his Lord's preſence, as "*his joy* "*and crown*." He no longer "groans, being burdened;—the earthly houſe of his tabernacle is diſſolved, and he has a building of God, an houſe not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!" The imperfections of his time-ſtate are no more; for he has "waſhed his "robes, and made them white, in the blood of the "lamb." His death is as a ſword piercing through many ſouls, and by it the thoughts of many hearts will be more clearly revealed.

This providence may prove a trial of your faith in Jeſus, and of your love to his goſpel; for if he ſhould not be ſucceeded by an *evangelical* miniſter, you will be called to follow the Redeemer, "without the camp" of the *national church*, ſuffering reproach for his ſake. *Others* will diſplay their ſelf-righteous pride, their hypocritical

critical profeſſions, their unbelieving, and worldly ſpirit, by "turning away their ears from the truth to "fables;" walking after "the traditions of men, the "rudiments and courſe of this world, and not after "Chriſt." If this "man of God," ſhould be ſuc-"ceeded by one who "preaches ſmooth things and "prophecies deceits," ſuch hearers will reflect upon the miniſtry of Cadogan, as too ſtrict, too zealous, and too much tinctured with enthuſiaſm.

"An evil man out of the evil treaſure of his heart "bringeth forth evil things." One in your neighbourhood ſpeaking the language of others, ſaid, "Pity "but Cadogan had died years ago." Well, ye oppoſers of Jeſus and of his ſaints! this faithful ſervant of God is removed; you have obtained your wiſh; this meſſenger of God ſhall bring you no more "heavy tid-"ings," to alarm your fears; he ſhall no longer diſturb your *falſe-peace* by the purity of his character, the ſpirituality of his converſation, or by the fidelity of his warnings againſt ſin. He ſhall no longer offend your pride, by declaring your guilt, depravity, and condemnation, as ſinners againſt God; nor by proclaiming the riches of divine grace and mercy to ſinners, in the perſon and work of a REDEEMER. You may now "eat, drink, "and be merry." Purſue your carnal pleaſures, your idle amuſements, and the gains of covetouſneſs, even on the Lord's day. Go on, confident and eaſy in the ways of your heart; but know, that Cadogan will have a ſtation at *the bar of God*, as a *witneſs* againſt you, if the grace of God does not change your hearts. You may triumph in the removal of the goſpel from St. Giles's; but "the triumphing of the wicked is ſhort;

"and

" and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment!" Nor can the ſerious *diſſenters*, at Reading, but feel for you and for themſelves. It is true, they may, with me, grieve, that you have not, like them, *the privilege of chuſing your own miniſter*. It may grieve them, that as churchmen, you lie at the mercy of *politicians* and *ſtateſmen* in the appointment of a miniſter. They may wiſh you to ſee, that the officers-worſhip, and diſcipline of the diſſenting churches, are *more agreeable to ſcriptural ſimplicity*, than thoſe of the national church. I own to you, that it ſhocks my underſtanding, it ſhocks my ſenſibility, to think of *a lay-chancellor* appointing a miniſter to *a church of Chriſt!* I cannot expreſs to you my feelings, when with my Bible in my hand, I think of a ſucceſſor to Cadogan, a biſhop or overſeer, the firſt and principal officer in the church of God, being choſen by political friendſhips, and regulated by ſtate reaſons. Although as diſſenters we cannot mourn for the *church of England*, we unfeignedly ſympathiſe with you in the loſs the *church of Chriſt* has ſuſtained in the death of dear Cadogan. The righteous periſh, and we lay it to heart. " Help! Lord; for the godly man ceaſeth; for the " faithful miniſters fail from among the children of " men!" That the Lord Jeſus, the only judge, law-giver, and king of his church, may hear your prayers, guide you by his counſel, and amply make up your great loſs by the ſmiles of his countenance, the dictates of his word, and operations of his Providence, is the prayer of

Your affectionate Friend,

JOHN COOKE.

MY

MY DEAR FRIEND, Maidenhead.

WHAT can you and your friends who love the pure goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt, propoſe to yourſelves as the path of duty, now your ſpiritual watchman, Cadogan, is no more?—If you were *diſſenters*, your path would be plain; namely, to ſeek for *another* evangelical miniſter; for they are not liable to have a mere "hireling" *impoſed* upon them—they believe that Jeſus is the SOLE HEAD of the church, and that *the people* have a right to chuſe their own paſtors.

No lord biſhop nor lord chancellor can appoint their teachers. In this appointment they own but "one "Lord." JESUS CHRIST has not given the civil magiſtrate this power; it is one of thoſe things which does not belong to Cæſar. We are commanded to be "ſubject unto the higher powers," in *civil* but not in *religious* matters. In *civil* concerns, "Render unto "Cæſar the things that are Cæſar's;" this is our plain and indiſpenſable duty: and in *religious* affairs, we ſhould be equally careful to "render unto GOD the things that are God's;" but, alas! how many render unto CÆSAR the things that are God's, by acknowledging *human* authority in things which are above its proper ſphere. The civil magiſtrates in the apoſtles days were *Pagans*; yet they obeyed them in every thing enjoined by the word of God, but never ſubmitted their *ſouls* to them in religious matters; and even when the civil magiſtrates *interfered* with their

duty

duty to Chriſt, as they *often* did, this was their anſwer, "We ought to obey God, rather than man."

*Let Cæſar's due be ever paid,*
*To Cæſar and his throne,*
*But conſciences and ſouls were made*
*To be the Lord's alone.*

But you are profeſſed members of the church of England; and as ſuch, you prefer the goſpel in the church. Well, if the goſpel removes from St. Giles's to St. Mary's, or to any other church in Reading, follow it; and leave St. Giles's to "the owls and dragons." However, I doubt not, but that you will firſt give Mr. Cadogan's ſucceſſor a fair and candid hearing.

Hear and obſerve him: if he preaches Chriſt and follows Chriſt to your edification, "rejoice in his light," and bleſs God for him; but if the lord chancellor ſhould appoint for you a man of a contrary deſcription, leave him to read to the pews, to the walls, and to hearers after his own heart. It is the promiſe of God to his church, "I will give you paſtors according to "my heart, who ſhall feed you with knowledge and "underſtanding." But a worldly-minded miniſter is not a paſtor after his heart. He is an enemy to Chriſt; and inſtead of *feeding* the people, he *poiſons* them with erroneous doctrines, and corrupts their morals by his ſinful examples. Such a man will pleaſe the taſte of the *vain* and the *giddy*; the *ſenſual*, the *careleſs*, and proud *Phariſee*; but "woe be unto the paſtors that deſtroy "and ſcatter the ſheep of my paſture, ſaith the Lord."

Tell me, if you are able to tell me, how can "a "blind

"blind watchman" diſcern your dangers? "how can "a dumb dog bark," to alarm you? how can one deſtitute of "the key of knowledge," open divine truth to your underſtandings? how can a phyſician of no value miniſter health and cure to your wounded conſciences? You would not truſt your body with ſuch a one, and what is your body to your ſoul?

It is our Lord's remark, "If the blind lead the "blind, both ſhall fall into the ditch." But what is more unnatural than to appoint the blind to lead thoſe who *enjoy the light?*

God has graciouſly opened the eyes of a goodly number of your acquaintances, and you cannot pleaſantly follow ſuch guides. You know the Shepherd's voice, and will not—dare not, follow a ſtranger. I doubt not but many who are not ſo divinely inſtructed as yourſelves, will, through the power of bigotry, or worldly intereſt, or pride of reputation, or through the influence of carnal relations and connexions, continue at St. Giles's, even if the genuine goſpel ſhould not be preached there. If they prefer their pariſh church to the goſpel, the *church of England* to THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, you will be led to ſuſpect, that not the grace of God, not the love of Chriſt, not the ſublime doctrines of grace, but the prejudices of education, the example of parents or friends, the force of cuſtom, and an undue reverence for perſons and places, have had too great an influence on their conduct.

I am gratified by a convenient place wherein to worſhip; I am a friend to decency, in the outward order of our public ſervices; I am an advocate for a *due* re-

ſpect

ſpect to all men, and I venerate learning; but the goſpel, that proclamation of divine love, that mirror of a divine Immanuel, that vehicle of divine light, that inſtrument of divine power, tranſcends *them all.* This goſpel adminiſters food to the hungry and medicine to the broken heart. Jeſus Chriſt preached it on a mountain, in a ſynagogue, in a ſhip, in a private houſe, at a well ſide. Can thoſe be juſtified who wiſh to confine it to a pariſh church? Rather ſay, it is not the *man*, the *place*, the *form*, ſhall detain me, when the *goſpel* departs. If I cannot hear it in a church, let me hear it in a meeting; if I cannot hear it from a prieſt, let me hear it from a layman. Who would not prefer a diamond in a nut-ſhell, to a pebble in an alabaſter-box; or a wedge of gold, from the hand of a *ſooty Ethiopian*, to an empty purſe, though preſented by an *European?*

To your ears, who have been ſo well taught, the ſound of the goſpel is ſo familiar and ſo harmonious, as to render the voice of a *mere* moral *reader* "as ſound-"ing braſs, or a tinkling cymbal." On hearing ſuch a man, you will depart from the church, exclaiming, "If the trumpet give an uncertain ſound, who ſhall "prepare himſelf for the battle?" Whilſt you are ſeeking the Lord for direction during your unſettled ſtate, you will wait upon him in your cloſets, in your families, and under a *luminous miniſtry.* You will not long wait under the miniſtry of a perſon who is unſkilful in the word of God, but viewing him and the hearers who admire him, as "ſitting in darkneſs, and "in the region and ſhadow of death," your *conduct* will

harmonize with your *prayers*; and departing from "the congregation of the dead," where you find a *dead miniſtry*, *dead ſouls*, with a *dead faith*, *dead frames*, and *dead works*, you will watch, and pray, "Lead us "not into temptation." Wiſhing that "the ſpirit of "counſel" may reſt upon you all,

I am, very affectionately, yours,

JOHN COOKE.

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MY DEAR FRIEND, Feb. 11, 1797.

In my laſt letter to you I remarked, that if Mr. Cadogan be ſucceeded by a clergyman who ſubſtitutes a little morality for "the unſearchable riches of "Chriſt," it will be inconſiſtent with your *experience*, your *prayers*, and threatening to your *ſafety*, to ſit under his miniſtry. Some perſons contend for the *harmleſſneſs* of error; but let us beware of "leaning to "our own underſtandings," and proudly ſuppoſing, that we can ſit under erroneous doctrines without falling by them. How often do the words of erroneous men "eat as doth a canker?" Your late miniſter's doctrine was not yea and nay. He preached to you "Jeſus Chriſt, the ſame yeſterday, to-day, and for "ever." This was the end and the ſcope of his converſation and miniſtry. "Remember him who had "the rule over you, whoſe faith follow, and be not "carried about with *diverſe* and *ſtrange doctrine*."

Did Mr. Cadogan preach to you the goſpel of Chriſt? Did he publiſh to you the ſame goſpel in which St. Paul gloried? If he did, and any man preach unto you another goſpel, do *not encourage* him in his perilous work, and thereby endanger your own ſoul; rather let him be left to conſider the apoſtle's warning, Gal. i. 8, 9.

Forget not, my friend, that you and a few more will be looked to as *fathers* and *examples* to "the "babes in Chriſt." Beware of being ſtumbling blocks to them. "Take care that you offend not theſe little "ones," or lead them into ſin, by any compliance of friendſhip, or of "fleſhly wiſdom," contrary to "the "ſcriptures of truth."

The apoſtle exhorts young believers, as "new born "babes, to deſire the ſincere (or unmixed) milk of the "word, that they may grow thereby;" but if this word is *mixed* and *adulterated*, will it not hinder the *ſpiritual growth* of theſe infant believers? Will they not grow weak and languid, or elſe careleſs, and worldly? Should it be ſaid to them, "Ye did run well; who did "hinder you?" Would they not be conſtrained to anſwer, "Some of Mr. Cadogan's beſt informed hearers" beguiled us from "the ſimplicity that is in Chriſt," by ſetting us the example of hearing a corrupt teacher, under pretence of "*waiting for the Lord.*"

"Whoſoever abideth not in the doctrine of Chriſt, "hath not God."—Mark the following words: "If "there come any unto you, (under the character of "a religious teacher) and bring not this doctrine,— "receive him not into your houſe, (to give him

" countenance and ſupport), neither wiſh him God
" ſpeed: for he that biddeth him God ſpeed, is a
" partaker of his evil deeds." This is THE WORD OF THE LORD; and I am the more particular on this point, as I believe you will have advice oppoſite to this from *the word of man*, and perhaps even from ſome *wiſe* and *good* men, who cheriſh ſuch a *bigotted attachment* to the eſtabliſhed church, as to adviſe God's people to continue in it, even where the congregation is deſtitute of a preacher of the " truth as it is in " Jeſus." Should this appear incredible to any ſerious perſon, it is no more than it did to me until I was made acquainted with the following and ſimilar facts.

In a certain family the father, who was an enemy to Chriſt and to the truth as it is in Jeſus, told his children, who loved the goſpel, that if they went to the diſſenting meeting-houſe (the *only* place where they could hear the goſpel in the neighbourhood), he would *turn them out of doors*. In this diſtreſſing ſituation, they applied for counſel to a *ſerious clergyman* of the eſtabliſhed church, who adviſed them, " to go to " church with their father, and not to the diſſenting " meeting, againſt his will." Well, thus adviſed, they went to church to pleaſe their father, until the power of a tormenting CONSCIENCE was felt, and the barrenneſs of the moral preacher had exhauſted their patience. At length, after ſhewing me his letter, they aſked me what I thought was their duty. I told them " he that loveth father and mother more than Chriſt, " cannot be his diſciple." On this they reſolutely left the church, and have followed the goſpel of Jeſus

to the diſſenting meeting, where they hear it to this day. In the ſame ſpirit the Rev. Mr. ———, an evangelical clergyman, after being diſmiſſed from the pariſh church where he had been uſeful, adviſed his hearers to continue at the church under a worldly-minded reader of mere morality who ſucceeded him, and not to attend the diſſenting meeting in the place, where the genuine goſpel was ſucceſsfully preached.—He ſaid the Diſſenters had no right to adminiſter the ordinances, and that he wondered the earth did not open and ſwallow them up as it did Corah, Dathan, and Abiram. Poor man! he muſt continue to wonder, for God ſtill preſerves the earth as firm under the foot of a diſſenter as a churchman. I hope his paſſions will cool, and his mind be better informed, before the earth is opened to receive him.

A clergyman in the pariſh of —— was ſucceſsful in preaching the goſpel — numbers, awakened under his miniſtry, "received Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, and "walked in him." This evangelical miniſter was removed from ———, and ſucceeded by a carnal, blind, moral *reader* of ſermons. Thoſe ſouls who were "alive unto God," on finding no ſpiritual food for their ſouls, applied to an evangelical miniſter in the eſtabliſhed church for advice. He readily perſuaded them to continue in the church. "But, Sir," ſaid they, "the GOSPEL is not preached in it;" then ſaid this clergyman, "be contented without it." When the perſons who applied to him gave me this information, I exclaimed, "*Incredible!*" "Indeed, Sir," they replied, "theſe were his words, and although we were churchmen,

men, and had hardly heard of the word *Diſſenter*, we were obliged to leave the church, build a meeting-houſe, and call an evangelical miniſter to preach among us." "Well," ſaid I, "and what did you think of the *bad* advice of the *good* clergyman?" "Think, Sir," they replied, "we thought he had more zeal for the *eſtabliſhed church*, than for the intereſt of our ſouls."—Bigotry! cold-hearted, unfeeling bigotry! to adviſe immortal ſouls to "be contented without the preach-"ing of that goſpel which brings life and immortality "to light." What! be contented without the miniſtry of that goſpel to which I owe all my comforts here and better hopes above? Be content without that goſpel which I am called to prefer to my neareſt relatives and deareſt friends,—my property, my health, my eaſe; yea, and to my *own life* alſo. "Get thee "behind me, Satan!" and leave me to follow the counſel of "the Spirit of wiſdom" in the following words:—"Beware of the (doctrinal) leaven of the phariſees,—TRY the ſpirits whether they are of God,—take heed *how* you hear!—take heed *what* you hear!—*prove* all things, and HOLD FAST that which is good." Theſe are the words of "the Wonderful "Counſellor" of the church, "hear ye HIM."

I ſaid in my laſt letter that you and many of Mr. Cadogan's hearers were Chriſt's ſheep; you know his voice and follow him, and a ſtranger will you not follow, but will flee from him." When Jeſus beheld the multitude, who had no better teachers than ſcribes and phariſees, "he was moved with compaſſion becauſe "they were as ſheep having no ſhepherd." They

did not want for carnal moral preachers, but Christ said they were not *shepherds*. If one of this character should be *imposed* on the congregation at St. Giles's, (for the *people* have no *choice*), may God "keep you "in the hour of temptation, which will come upon "you to TRY you." So prays your sincere Friend,

JOHN COOKE.

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MY DEAR FRIEND,

SHOULD a carnal clergyman be imposed upon you at St. Giles's, to succeed Mr. Cadogan, what a distressing *contrast* will he form to the *character* and *ministry* of that "man of God!"—Compare the *sermons*, the present *effects*, and the future *consequences*, of the ministry of each, and one would suppose no spiritual mind could be at a loss what step to take, should such a successor be appointed by the lord-chancellor for your teacher. The one, perhaps, will purchase his sermons at a bookseller's, or borrow them from human, perhaps *pagan*, authors. He will coldly *read* them on the Lord's-day, and rejoice to close his irksome duty; the other studies his BIBLE, meditates upon his *text*, considers the *circumstances* of his hearers, and his own *experience* of the power of God. He enters into his closet, and prays "to the "Father of Lights," until he is, in a suitable measure, "filled with grace and truth," for his work.

This man of God goes forth to preach, depending, not on a *written* ſermon, nor on *his own powers*; but on "the ſpirit of might." The former reads a treatiſe on the dignity of human nature, on the freewill and moral capacity of man to obey the divine commands: the latter preaches the fall of man, in Adam, his depravity, his guilt, his helpleſs and ruined condition as a ſinner. One has a little *moral virtue* to recommend; the other proclaims the dignity, the character, the grace, and ſalvation of Jeſus! One, exhorts his hearer by his poor, ſinful ſervices to *earn* heaven, as wages for his work;—the other opens the grace and love of "God in Chriſt," beſtowing Heaven, as *a free gift*, on the greateſt of ſinners, believing on the Son of God. Should the former go farther, even then he only, like Moſes, ſhews the ſinner his duty and his danger; but the latter, like a true evangeliſt, exhibits Jeſus as atoning for ſin, bringing in an everlaſting righteouſneſs for the believing ſinner's juſtification,—living to intercede for his acceptance, and pouring upon him the "ſpirit of "wiſdom, of power, and of grace," as his comforter, ſtrength, and guide.

Nor is their *manner* of preaching leſs different. One reads his ſhort ſermon, without ſpiritual fervour, without ſuitable feeling; nay, perhaps, reads it as a *taſk*, without pleaſure to himſelf or profit to his hearers;—the other, preaches the truth, with unaffected ſimplicity, with lively zeal, with application to the caſes, and appeals to the *conſciences*, of his hearers.

How different the *effects* of their diſcourſes! One claſs of hearers go home, with an air of gaiety, flattering their own and each others vanity, pleaſed that they have been to church; they exclaim, what a *fine* ſermon, becauſe it fed their pride, by ſubſtituting the *form* of religion for the *power*; and leaving them eaſy in their favourite ſins; but many of the hearers of the evangelical miniſter are convinced of their loſt condition, and are crying for mercy, or ſhedding tears of joy for the forgiveneſs of their ſins. Some of them go from the ſermon as ſlaves liberated, as debtors diſcharged, as conquerors of ſin, of Satan, and of the world. Their patience under affliction,—their reſignation on the loſs of earthly comforts, by bereaving Providences,—their meekneſs under perſecution,—their relief from the burdens of guilt, fear and grief, diſplay the *efficacy* of the "miniſtry of the Spirit." No wonder if ſuch ſhould be compelled to break forth in ſtrains of grateful joy, "How beautiful are "the feet of them that preach the goſpel of peace, "and bring glad tidings of good things!" When loſt ſheep are found under ſuch a miniſter; when prodigals return; when backſliders are healed, and all encouraged to live by faith on the Son of God, who can help ſaying, "Bleſſed are the people who "know the joyful ſound!" The hearers of the "miniſter of the letter," are awfully negligent of their bible, of ſecret prayer, of family worſhip, and religious converſation. To hear one or two ſermons on Lord's day, and to read the forms of prayer, are, in *their* eſtimation, duties highly meritorious; and all beyond this is "being righteous overmuch."

But

But whilſt theſe *ſelf-deceivers* are indulging themſelves part of the Lord's-day, ſome in their beds, ſome in riding out on pleaſure, ſome in unneceſſary buſineſs, ſome in worldly amuſements,—and others in unedefying converſation, and formal viſiting;—(things which they call *innocent*, becauſe agreeable to their ſenſual minds), thoſe who are "born again," and walking "in the ſpirit on the Lord's-day," begin the day with reading the ſcriptures, with examining their hearts and praying in *ſecret*, for a bleſſing on the religious duties and opportunities before them.

Theſe feel themſelves in their *element*, when hearing the goſpel of ſalvation, when pouring out their ſouls in prayer to God, or when uniting in ſolemn and delightful ſongs of praiſe. Poor, preciſe enthuſiaſts! they know not how they may employ their time *better* than in attending to the duties and privileges of godlineſs: and they are ſuch fanatics as to think, that ſuch a conduct is more rational, more *improving* to their ſouls, and more *acceptable to* GOD, keeping the ſabbath "according to the courſe of this "world;" that is, in formal and heartleſs devotion, and faſhionable diſſipation.

Compare the *conſequences* of their miniſtry to themſelves and their hearers in the *eternal world*. Think of an unfaithful miniſter and his deluded hearers meeting in another world!—How will they addreſs him?—"*Curſed deceiver!* you told us, that thoſe miniſters who zealouſly and faithfully opened the ſcriptures,—declared to men their ſinful and condemned condition,—directed all their hopes to the ſacrifice, righteouſneſs,

righteouſneſs, and grace of Chriſt,—were methodiſts, enthuſiaſts, deceivers: but *you* were the deceiver! you flattered our pride,—encouraged us to truſt to our own imperfect ſervices,—preſumptuouſly to hope for heaven, while deſtitute of *regeneration of heart!* We learned of *you* to be worldly-minded,—to reſt in the mere *external* performance of duties,—to comply with the ſpirit and cuſtoms of the world,—and thought we *muſt* be right, becauſe we followed the counſel and example of you our *miniſter*. *Curſed deceiver!* you ſhall be the ſcorn of God, of angels, and of devils; and particularly the ſcorn of all thoſe ſouls who ſhare with you in a damnation, to which your ſmooth, mercenary, man-pleaſing miniſtry hath brought us!—*Curſed deceiver!*—Look yonder! there are the faithful miniſters and their hearers, whom you deſpiſed and miſrepreſented: ſee! they have "entered "into the joy of their Lord."—Yonder is *Cadogan*, and numbers of his *hearers*, who received his meſſages, whom we were taught to laugh at as fools, zealots, people of diſordered minds; but they were wiſe to ſalvation, they "fled from the wrath to "come,"—whilſt *we*, taught by your ſmooth, flattering ſermons, fancied ourſelves ſure of heaven. "Between us there is a great and unpaſſable gulph." They are happy for ever, while we are loſt without hope. We cannot alleviate our own torments, but we will for ever add to yours!" But I forbear; for who can fully deſcribe the vaſt difference between the miniſtry of two ſuch oppoſite characters!

I hope, my dear friend, you have not miſunderſtood

me:

me: I love all good men, whether among diſſenters or in the eſtabliſhment, and occaſionally hear preachers in both connections; and in both I deteſt bigotry and party attachments. I would conſtantly hear the goſpel in the church of England, rather than an Arian or Socinian, among the Diſſenters, although I differ from its friends in my views of the ſimplicity of the *officers*, the *worſhip*, and the *diſcipline*, of the church of Chriſt; and I am aſtoniſhed at the party zeal and dangerous illiberality of *ſome pious* clergymen in the church of England, who can adviſe real chriſtians to prefer an heavy drone, who reads a dull eſſay on moral virtue, in a ſtyle unintelligible to his poor hearers, to an evangelical miniſtry among the Diſſenters. I know, and highly eſteem, ſome evangelical miniſters in the eſtabliſhed church; who, I am ſure, could not offer ſuch advice: nay, they have as ſeriouſly adviſed members of their own communion, to prefer an evangelical Diſſenting miniſter to a legal preacher in the eſtabliſhment, as I have now done.

" It is ordained of God, that they who preach the " goſpel, ſhould live of the goſpel:" and if none but ſuch as *preached the goſpel*, were to *live* by it, ſome amongſt the Diſſenters, and *thouſands* of faſhionable loiterers in the eſtabliſhment, muſt immediately quit the miniſterial office or ſtarve.—But it is *ordained of man*, that thouſands who obſcure, pervert, and deſpiſe the goſpel, ſhould live by it; and many of them not only live by it,—but live in pride, luxury, and idleneſs. With their hundreds and thouſands a year, they pay a poor man, whom they call their *curate*, ſome

ſome thirty, ſome twenty pounds a year, to preach, baptize, and bury the dead; whilſt they themſelves are "faring ſumptuouſly every day."—Theſe awful characters, who indulge in ſports and worldly amuſements, inſtead of *ſtudying* the *ſcriptures* and "labouring in word and doctrine," are to be called, by the moſt ſhocking abuſe of words, miniſters of the goſpel! doctors of divinity! &c. &c. but Jeſus calls them "hirelings who care not for the flock;"—"unfaithful ſtewards," who muſt ſoon "give an account of "their ſtewardſhip."

Under ſuch miniſters, or ſuch as they appoint, we never hear of any *converſion* of ſouls to Chriſt. Their hearers are united in ſelf-righteouſneſs, enmity to ſpiritual things, in the love of the world, and indifference to the bible. Such are not "God's building," for they are not on the foundation; they are not "God's "huſbandry," for they are not under ſpiritual cultivation;—they are not "God's houſehold," for they have not the diſpoſition and character of his children: they are not "the temple of God," for "the Spirit of "glory reſts not upon them."

Should you or any of Mr. Cadogan's believing hearers, through the influence of *evil counſel*, ſit under a miniſter *ſpiritually dead*,—you will find him at beſt a "miniſter of the letter which killeth;" and ſome, like the hearers of thoſe teachers who ſucceeded the apoſtle Paul, in preaching to the Galatians, may very ſoon "be brought into bondage."—It is the preaching of "the croſs," which is attended by "the "power of God, to ſalvation."—Let experience teſtify,

teſtify,—" Received you THE SPIRIT, by the preach-
" ing of the works of the law,—or by hearing (the
" doctrines) of faith?"

Indeed, thoſe teachers who exalt the power and virtue of man, in contradiſtinction to the Spirit and righteouſneſs of Chriſt, do generally deny the agency of the Spirit upon the minds of men, ſince the apoſtles' days: a proof that they themſelves are deſtitute of the " fruits of the ſpirit."

They have nevertheleſs ſubſcribed to articles and a liturgy, containing the doctrine of the Spirit's preſence and gracious influences in all believing ſouls. Are you and your friends going to church to *ſanction* ſuch error and ſelf-contradiction?—What, can *you* attend St. Giles's for half a year, or even for a month, to hear one thing in the deſk, and that again contradicted in the pulpit?—Does God's word *warrant* ſuch conduct? May you not with equal propriety go and wait upon the Lord for ſix months more at St. Mary's, or St. Lawrence's?—" Have you begun in
" the ſpirit, and are you now to be made perfect in
" the fleſh?"—But I hope better things of you and many of your friends, though I thus write. " *Stand*
" *faſt*, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Chriſt hath
" made you free; and be not entangled again with the
" yoke of bondage."—Let none of you think to ſtand, where the Galatians fell. God has no where engaged to keep us, if we raſhly run into danger; and if he does not permit his people to be *ruined* by erroneous doctrines, he may ſuffer them to be " en-
" tangled," as the apoſtle calls it—to puniſh their preſumption,

preſumption, and be a warning to others.—" Stand " upon your watch tower," leſt the ſoft inſinuations of thoſe you *highly eſteem* ſhould miſlead you.

My dear friend, " the fear of man bringeth a ſnare; " but whoſo putteth his truſt in the Lord ſhall be " ſafe."—It is my ſincere wiſh that every corrupt teacher may be converted, but if any perſon undertakes to adviſe you to wait upon the Lord under a carnal miniſter, under the preſumption that God may convert him, ſhould this poſſible caſe be realized, even in ſuch a caſe he gives you unſcriptural advice;—and I may as well conjecture, that, if you venture wilfully to follow ſuch counſel, you will fall into temptation, and draw others into the " ſnare of death" by your example!—Shun a man-pleaſing, half-decided, and trimming conduct. The goſpel is preached at Reading, in other places; and if it forſakes the church, I hope *you* alſo will forſake it, and attend where you can hear " the things which belong to your peace." Set a proper example to your children and chriſtian brethren; and if any of them ſhould trifle with the goſpel and pretend to wait upon the Lord under a miniſter who does not preach Chriſt, you may in this caſe ſay, " I am pure from your blood."

According to *your requeſt by letter*, I have given you my free thoughts upon your ſituation and duty. I have no perſonal intereſt in writing; nor ſhould I have taken ſuch liberty, if you had not aſked for it. I have written what *I ſeriouſly believe* to be the mind of God; and if you or your brethren ſhould be enticed to continue at St. Giles's under an unſound

preacher,

preacher, you will violate your duty and obligation to Chriſt; act contrary to your experience, your prayers, your ſafety and uſefulneſs; contrary to the comfort and improvement of your ſouls.

As far as the diſſenting intereſt, or the intereſt of the eſtabliſhed church, are the intereſt of Chriſt, may God proſper each of them: and may "every plant," of office, doctrine, worſhip, and diſcipline, in either, "which our Heavenly Father hath not planted, be "rooted up." Were this the caſe,—the power of appointing a miniſter over a congregation would never be lodged in the hands of *any one man*;—whether a lord biſhop,—a lord chancellor or patron, but in the *church itſelf*.—Diſſenting churches claim the right of chooſing their own teachers; and can I adviſe you to *reſign* that right? The *danger* of which, I ſhould ſuppoſe, *the preſent diſpenſation* might teach you and your friends. Your preſent *fears* that the lord-chancellor may give the living to an unconverted clergyman, prove that, *as churchmen*, you have *no choice* in the affair.

Wiſhing you grace to exerciſe the right Chriſt has given you, and in *all* things to give him the preeminence,

I am yours ſincerely,

JOHN COOKE.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Maidenhead.

I UNDERSTAND that my letters have produced in your mind very complicated feelings: this is what I expected, from a recollection of my former experience, when I was a warm bigot to the church of England. I can bear with you, even if you ſuſpect that, as a diſſenter, I have my prejudices. But remember, I was not *born* a diſſenter, as ſome expreſs themſelves; but ſince I have aſſociated with the diſſenters, and amongſt them found *the life of my ſoul*, I am free to own, that painful and pleaſant experience confirm my attachment to their principles. Born and educated in the boſom of the eſtabliſhed church, my mental blindneſs, ſelf-righteous pride, and educational attachment to her, were nouriſhed by the clergyman of the pariſh, who "walked after the fleſh:"—whoſe ſermons never diſturbed my ſleeping conſcience, exhibited my dangers, nor diſplayed the ſalvation of Chriſt, to my loſt ſoul.

Year after year I heard him *read* ſermons and prayers, and dreamed that his *indolence*, *formality*, and *hypocriſy*, were *religion!* This clergyman was a ſlave to his bottle, to the amuſements of the card-table, the pleaſures of the aſſembly-room, and the ſports of the field. The honeſt farmers often wondered to hear him in common converſation profanely exclaim, "Good "heavens! you ſurpriſe me; Chriſt, what a villain! "O Lord! who would have thought it? What a "curſed

"curſed fellow!" And notwithſtanding this habit of taking the Lord's name in vain in his common diſcourſe, when he appeared at church in his *robes*, I forgot all the ſhocking oppoſition of his *character* to his *office*, and reverenced him as a ſacred perſon! as the Lord's vicegerent upon earth. Having finiſhed his *taſk*, (for ſuch was reading ſermons and prayers to him) before he left the church-yard, he would reſume the converſation began on his entrance; upon hunting, dining, dancing, card-playing, or any other ſubject but *religion*. Yet, ſtrange infatuation! when I ſaw this man, with a grave face, in his ſurplice or gown, I loſt the uſe of my reaſon, and thought he muſt be an holy man. Under the wretched miniſtry of this clergyman I ſat for ten long years; during which period I was ſometimes proudly elated by comparing my beſt works with the worſt parts of my neighbours character, and ignorantly thought I had a *good heart*, becauſe I did not murder, ſteal, ſwear, commit whoredom, or neglect my church. I then moſt heartily deſpiſed all diſſenters, and thought the words Methodiſt, Diſſenter, or Preſbyterian, were always intended to deſcribe perſons who had committed one of the greateſt crimes, namely, *had left the church*. Oh! how I bleſſed myſelf, that I was, as I thought, of the true church; and often vowed I would never leave it. At other ſeaſons, I have ſecretly pined under a fear of hell, becauſe I was not *perfect* in my obedience. Then I would read the Bible, walk the fields weeping, praying, and vowing ſtricter obedience; but no true knowledge of my *heart*, my *condition*, or the *ſalvation of Chriſt*, did I obtain



until

until I heard the gospel in a *dissenting-meeting*. There I found some persons who had been converted to God for many years;—others anxiously inquiring after the salvation of their souls. The preachers spoke from their *hearts*, the great truths of God; the people were all attention, and appeared deeply *interested* in the discourses. *My* heart too was opened, to discern and feel my guilty condition, my depraved nature, and my condemnation by the law of God, on my obedience to which I had so blindly rested all my hopes. There too I learned the love of Christ to, and his sufferings for, sinners—for all sinners that believe in his name. Faith came by hearing; and I felt the joy of pardoned sin in my heart. I looked back and wondered at the darkness of the clergyman—I pitied his poor parishioners who were still "sitting in the region and shadow of "death. I stood amazed at *myself*, and the change of my views, experience, and pursuits; and was most astonished at the sovereignty and freedom of divine mercy to men, whilst others were left "walking accord-"ing to the course of this world." I said to myself, in what an awful condition are those souls at the church to which I belonged! I had never heard of such a thing as a soul being under convictions of its sinful and lost condition. None among them were inquiring after a *Saviour*—none *converted* to Christ. Indeed, I never heard the word *conversion* applied to any person in the church where I then lived.

How can you wonder, that after such *experience*—long and painful *experience*—of the fatal influence of the ministry of a blind, a fashionable clergyman, I should

caution

caution others againſt men of his deſcription? It is true, they are *eſtabliſhed* teachers; but ſo much the more dangerous; and ſo much the more reaſon for ſerious men to act as our Lord did towards the Jewiſh teachers of his day; namely, for the people's ſake, to expoſe their *ignorance* and *hypocriſy*, and to bring them into *deſerved contempt*.

I am aware, that ſome pious clergymen and private chriſtians have pleaded, "We may hear the ſcriptures "and good prayers read in the church, even if the "miniſter ſhould be an erroneous and unconverted "man." Suppoſe this to be true, there are ſtrong reaſons for ſhunning ſuch a miniſter; for, in the firſt place, this church is ſtill deſtitute of the *grand means* of converting ſouls. "It pleaſes God by the fooliſhneſs of "PREACHING, to ſave them that believe;" and not by the preaching of *error*, and the reading forms of prayer: by reading the ſcriptures in the deſk, and contradicting them in the pulpit.

In the ſecond place, the preaching lies in oppoſition to your own *prayers*. Do not you pray, "Lead us not "into temptation?" Does not Chriſt teach you to "watch and pray, that you enter not into tempta-"tion?" How then can it be conſiſtent with *your prayers*, or *Chriſt's counſel*, to venture upon hearing *erroneous doctrine*, becauſe it is preceded by good prayers? What! is there no *danger* in hearing unſound doctrines? It is true, God promiſes to "guide his peo-"ple by his counſel," and part of that counſel is found in the following words, "Ceaſe, my ſon, to hear the

"counsel which causeth to err from the words of "knowledge." Can we expect God to *bless* as *food* what he warns us to shun as *poison*. What if the Scriptures are read in the church, you had much better read them at *home*, than go to church to hear them read in the *desk*, and obscured, contradicted, and wrested in the *pulpit*.

Farther—Such a conduct publicly countenances error, and tends to confirm others, especially the poor and illiterate part of the congregation, in that common prejudice amongst them, namely, that a man who came from the university, followed too by men of knowledge and character, must be right.

Moreover, the *manner* in which the prayers are *generally* read by such clergymen, and attended to by the people, does not promise much advantage. Judge, what numbers think of the forms of prayer, by their *conduct*, in entering the church when they are half read, or nearly finished. And what is to be expected from the low, dull, slovenly, or rapid manner, in which they are read by the generality of clergymen, and even by some *serious* men?

And what visible *effects* are produced by such reading and sermons? What *characters* are formed by it? What but a number of self-conceited Pharisees, full of enmity against spiritual and experimental religion wherever they behold it, whether among the evangelical clergy, or dissenters? "Their dry morality is but a "dream to amuse, or a drug to stupify."

However such narrow minds may confine their views

of uſefulneſs to the national church, the LORD is not confined to it; for whilſt thouſands of the eſtabliſhed churches are deſtitute of the viſible tokens of the preſence, grace, and power, of God, thouſands of religious communities without their forms are honoured by "the grace of God which bringeth ſalvation," not only to the ears, but alſo to the *hearts* of men.

Reading is abundantly favoured with the goſpel, and if your fears ſhould be realized, and "the truth" ſhould not continue at St. Giles's, you may hear the goſpel, and enjoy all "the ordinances of the Lord," among the diſſenters. They will be glad to receive as many of you as Chriſt has received, notwithſtanding the ſuggeſtions of ſome perſons who are unfriendly to them, and repreſent them as *too rigid* in the qualifications they require of perſons who enter into church-communion with them. It muſt be allowed that *ſome* qualifications are required, and I know not any diſſenting ſocieties who demand, either more or leſs, than *converſion to Chriſt, apparent in their gracious experience, holy diſpoſition, and converſation.* To obtain ſatisfaction on this point, we uſe the following methods, adapted to the capacities and circumſtances of thoſe who ſtand propoſed for members. Firſt we receive a *written* account of their ſentiments and experience, which is read to the church. Upon this any member has a right to ſpeak what he knows of the perſon, and relate the religious converſation which has paſſed between them. The miniſter and ſome of the members alſo, *converſe* with the perſon propoſed. But all chriſtians cannot *write*; and if they could,

could, we permit them to *speak* their sentiments, and as much of their experience as may be necessary to satisfy the church; and as some sincere and timid believers are neither able to write, nor *speak* their experience before a church, they are accommodated by declaring their views and experience to the minister, and to any other member who wishes for more satisfaction than he obtains by the *minister's report*. Every member feels interested to preserve the church from the intrusions of hypocrites, and to encourage the *weakest* believer in the congregation to fulfil the express will of Christ, relative to "the Lord's supper." Thus runs his command to his followers, "This do, in remembrance of "me." Christian reader, do you *love* Christ? then keep *this* commandment. When Saul was converted, he desired to join himself to the church of Christ (as every converted soul ought to do, as soon as he can); but as the church doubted of his conversion, Barnabas related to them the *evidences* and *manner* of his effectual calling. The church believed this report, and received Saul a member of their community. Acts ix. 26—28. Now what is there unscriptural in our manner of *admitting* members? Tares and wheat might grow together in the eastern country, yet who but an *enemy* would *sow* tares with the wheat? If tares and wheat, that is, the righteous and the wicked, must grow together in the *world*, it is our duty to preserve the *church* as free from tares as possible. You, my dear brother, would not wilfully receive into your *family* fraudulent, intemperate, or idle servants. You may be deceiv-

ed;

ed; but you take the beſt methods in your power to obtain ſatisfaction reſpecting their characters; and is it of no importance who are admitted into *Chriſt's family?* Should a ſervant with whom you received a good character, prove unworthy of your place by diſhoneſty or idleneſs, would not you diſmiſs him from your houſe, and ſervice? Can you think it ſtrange of the diſſenters, if a perſon whom they have received into the church ſhould perſiſt in any thing to the diſgrace of their profeſſion, if they comply with the apoſtle's command to the Corinthians, "*Put away* from you that evil per-"ſon."

Some pious churchmen have been taught that the diſſenting churches are too forward in cutting off members; but this, I am perſuaded, is a miſrepreſentation. Chriſt commands them to treat *an incorrigible* offender as an *heathen man.* Mat. xviii. 15—17.

Such a character, like "a little leaven, may leaven "the whole lump;" we are therefore exhorted to "purge it out." Such a perſon is "a root of BITTER-"NESS," and we muſt "take heed," leſt in "ſpring-"ing up, it ſhould trouble us, and thereby MANY BE "DEFILED." If any one is called *a brother* in the faith, and perſiſts in known ſin, the apoſtle exhorts us not even to *eat* with him. When I conſider the word of God upon this caſe, I am diſpoſed to think we oftener go to the *other* extreme, and grow *too lax* in church-diſcipline; and I do believe, that ſome diſſenting ſocieties may trace the declenſion of religion among them to the neglect of exerciſing ſcriptural diſcipline. In the

church

church of which I have the honour of being paſtor, we have ſeparated ſeveral perſons in twelve years. It is a *painful*, but *neceſſary* duty; and when performed agreeable to the word of God, has a very ſalutary influence upon the church, and often is bleſſed to humble the offender, and bring him to repentance. We ſhould mix lenity and fidelity to him, with zeal for the purity of the church. We ought to be particularly guarded againſt ſubſtituting our *feelings* for our *rule*, inſtead of the word of Chriſt. Our tenderneſs ſhould be regulated by a regard to the recovery of the offender, the purity of the church, and the honour of Chriſt. And if any perſon expelled ſhews ſubſtantial and permanent evidences of his repentance, miniſter and people are happy to readmit them to communion.

Now is it wonderful, conſidering the depravity of the human heart, and the activity of Satan, that a few are ſeparated from us? Is it not rather matter of wonder that we meet with no more inſtances? Such diſcipline is as neceſſary to the proſperity of the church, as pruning to the fruitfulneſs of the vine, or the amputation of a mortified limb, to the preſervation of the body. When a chriſtian ſociety grows indifferent to *the purity of truth or diſcipline*, "the glory" is departing.

To conclude, I would much rather adviſe you to build a chapel and uſe the church prayers, than to attend St. Giles's, or any other church, and wait for the miniſter's converſion; but for the following reaſons I do not propoſe this meaſure to you.

Firſt,

Firſt, becauſe I have heard you and others of Mr. Cadogan's hearers ſay that you enjoyed his *extemporary* prayers, more than the *forms* of prayer read. Your *experience* pleads againſt forms, or rather decides in favour of *free prayer*. It obliges the miniſters (who uſe it in a *proper manner*) to an habit of diligence in converſing with divine things.

A ſecond advantage of *extemporary* prayer is, that it tends to keep up the attention, and excite the pious affections of the worſhippers.

Thirdly, It is capable of being beſt ſuited to the circumſtances of the congregation, and to various ſudden and intereſting occurrences which ought not to paſs unnoticed in public devotion.

*See the Proteſtant Diſſenters' Catechiſm.*

Now a perpetual confinement to a *form* of prayer much hinders the free exerciſe of our own thoughts and deſires;—expoſes us to the danger of "quenching the "ſpirit;"—cramps and impriſons thoſe powers which God has given us for improvement and uſe;—leads us into the danger of hypocriſy and mere *lip ſervice*;—obſtructs our progreſs in ſelf-acquaintance;—and renders our converſe with God more imperfect than it otherwiſe might be, as no *forms* of prayer are perfectly ſuited to all the frames of our ſpirit, or fitted to all our occaſions in the things of this life, and the life to come. I would prefer that method which is likely to ſuit any poſſible ſituation I may be in.

*See Watts's Guide to Prayer.*

Wiſhing, notwithſtanding we are conſcious of many imperfections, that we may, at leaſt, "go on to per-"fection,"

I am, with unfeigned regard,

Your friend and brother,

JOHN COOKE.

THE END.

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